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## A Study of Baumeister's Self Defining Process in *The Blind Assassin*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the novel *The Blind Assassin* through the lens of Baumeister's self-defining process. Identity, being an interpretation of self, lies in persistence and consistence over time. Identity crisis is the inability to define basic values, long-term goals and major affiliations, all of which help a person in the process of self-defining. *The Blind Assassin* being the story of two sisters, Iris Griffen and Laura Griffen, is helpful in developing a comparison of the two characters who are subjected to same upbringing and same social surroundings. The elder sister manages to assert her will in a competitive society while the younger one suffers from identity crisis and finds solace in suicide. Baumeister's model of identity provides basis to interpret the inability of Laura in defining herself. The more a person is socially compatible the more she is at ease with herself. Her biological, social and sexual needs never addressed, however, she keeps trying to make choices and struggles to realize her potential. She ends up discontented as she is taken as an eccentric and dissatisfied as her own sister gives her the greatest shock of her life. The more a person is allowed to make choices the more successful she is in defining herself. Laura completes her self-defining process by driving off the bridge which Freud interprets as a way of giving birth. This paper helps understanding the ways in which society particularly family affect an individual's decisions and the ways in which an individual tries to assert her/his will.

**Keywords:** Baumeister, identity, identity crisis, *The Blind Assassin*

### Introduction

*The Blind Assassin* (2000), a novel of the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2000 and Hammett Prize in 2001. It is a memoir of eighty years old narrator Iris, and reflects on Canada of early twentieth century. It also shows a world that

changes after the war. This is the story of Chase family: Mr. Chase and his two daughters, Iris Chase and Laura Chase. The father is a war survivor and remains depressed all the time. His wife dies after giving birth to a premature baby, leaving him with the responsibility of their daughters. The father does not know how the girls should be raised. His efforts of making them righteous end in making the girls anxious and over-burdened. *The Blind Assassin* begins with the frame story of twenty-five years old Laura's suicide. The story within the story is the memoir of eighty-three years old Iris. She has written it for her grand-daughter Sabrina who is completely unaware of the family history. It also talks about those events that lead to Laura's decision of driving off the bridge.

Since it is the story of two sisters who are born to the same family and raised in the same circumstances, a comparison of their characters and personal traits is helpful in tracing their differences. It also helps in seeing how identity is retained and how it remains consistent and differentiated in a lifetime. It also shows how differently two characters react to the same problem. Every character needs to be defined and failure in doing so often proves fatal.

### ***Research Objectives***

The objective of this study is to highlight the differences between two characters, Iris Chase and Laura Chase. Each person defines her/himself with the differences that she/he has with the other. Besides these personal traits another determining factor is social forces. Both personal choices and social factors define a person by determining the course of her/his life. A comparison of the lives of Iris and Laura bring to surface their differences. It explores the ways in which a person tries to remain consistent. Since an inconsistent identity creates identity crisis, it is of utmost importance to trace the time when the early signs of this crisis appear in a person.

### ***Research Questions***

The present study explores the ways in which Iris and Laura stay consistent and differentiated. Although the two were born to same parents, their behavior and pattern of life remains distinct. It also seeks the different ways in which two characters react to the same situation. What factors lead Iris to writing her memoir and Laura to commit violence on herself. It also tries to find if there is a connection between the failure of a person in 'defining self' and her/his ability to commit suicide.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The study has a universal appeal as the object of investigation is family unit. Family, being the smallest unit of society, stands for the ideals and norms that define a society. A society in its efforts to reinforce its existing values disapproves a person. It also discourages individuals who refuse to conform. Identity becomes a problem when a person faces social rejection. This identity crisis reaches its climax when a person finds no escape from the social norms. When family members become society's representatives, the non-conforming person gets disappointed and disillusioned, often going for extreme measures of committing violence on self or others. A close

introspection of the events leading to Laura's suicide is helpful in understanding the effect of society on the choices a person makes.

The study is also relevant to Pakistani society. On one hand, rigid family system finds personal choices a threat to its integrity. On the other hand, decisions are largely affected by economic factors, such as marrying for money. The society also disapproves optional choice in terms of religion. Effort of personalizing religion are condemned. The most interesting commonality is the way in which younger siblings are imposed on the elder ones when mother dies or gives birth to more children. The close relation between these inter-dependent siblings and their fight for parental approval is also relevant.

## Literature Review

Critical and scholarly work has been done on the *The Blind Assassin*. The available literature explores the technique of writing, complexity of plot and the impossibility of narrating the truth. The following passages discuss the most relevant scholarly work done on the novel.

In their critical work Cecil and Cecil (2008) place the concept of self in geographical context. The novel is explored with respect to place theory. The constructs of “essence of place, insideness and outsideness, the geographical self and the spatial characteristics of the elderly” are discussed to trace the “geography of personal identity” in the female protagonist of the novel (2008: 239). The deep-seated affections of a person with a place binds her/his personal and communal identity with that place.

Filtiness (2014) in her scholarly work “The end or The End: Ageing, Memory and Reliability in Margaret Atwood's Fictional Autobiography, *The Blind Assassin*” explores the aged-self and its biological, psychological and social effects on the protagonist. She begins her discourse by quoting Howell, “*The Blind Assassin* is more than just a memorial of one woman . . . [this text is defined as] historiographic meta-fiction . . . [it is a] self-reflexive novel, including historical events and people and a self-awareness of history and fiction as constructs” (2014: 43). The novel is also discussed with the idea of “stories of ageing” given by Mike Hepworth. The work explores the process of ageing in an “aged protagonist” who constantly revisits her past.

Ingersoll (2003) defines the novel as a “whodunit” since the very narrative “erupts into notion with the arousal of desire for an explanation of the mystery expressed in its first sentence” (533). The narrative expands to the point where Laura commits suicide. The work also explores the physical condition of Iris and how her body turns into a “writing instrument” (2003: 547). Along with the “troupe of the writing body” comes the “implications for the reader's function” as the narrator questions the matters concerning readership.

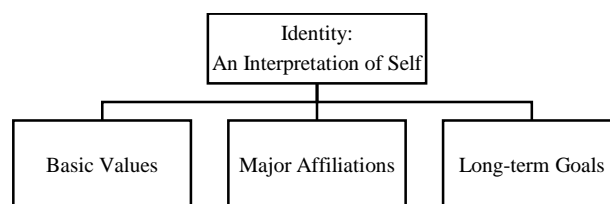
McWilliams (2010) explores the narrative of selfhood as bildungsroman. The novel is taken as a story of development to imply that the selves of two sisters emerge as puzzles knitted together within the layers of the narrative. He states that none of them conveys the complete truth and rely on each other for making the complete picture. Narrative is shown as a deliberate effort to invent selfhood.

The present study is different from the scholarly work done earlier as it focuses on the development of identity in the sisters and the emergence of identity crisis in Laura. Baumeister's idea of identity relies on the process of self-definition. This theoretical framework is of great help in understanding the personal and social factors that have contributed in Laura's suicide. The ability of a person to define herself is of prime importance while failure in doing so proves fatal. Similar study can be carried out in other novels where the characters on getting discouraged by the society resort to physical violence.

## Theoretical Framework

Baumeister (1986) in his book *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* describes his model of identity. Identity is defined as consistence and coherence of self over time. He relates it to the acquisition of identity components which meet the identity criteria and fulfill its functional aspect. Self is determined by its social context. The inspection of the social context is also important.

Baumeister explores the nature of identity and its dilemmas. He specifically points out the times when identity crisis begins. He lays stress on identifying the social changes that lead to this crisis. Identity is "a definition, an interpretation of self". A person suffering from identity crisis does not need his name or address. She/he needs basic values, long-term goals and major affiliations (1986: 4-5). Identity does not turn out to be a problem overnight. There is a series of historical stages that mark its development as a problem. Self-knowledge is the most important identity problem. Another problem is discovering and fulfilling one's potential as a unique individual. Baumeister maintains that the goal of this self-definition is Maslow's self-actualization which is helpful in realizing the personal potential. It is actualization that makes one contented and satisfied with her/his life-long struggle. When the biological and social needs of one are addressed only then, Maslow believed, self-actualization is possible.



**Figure 1.** Baumeister's Definition of Identity

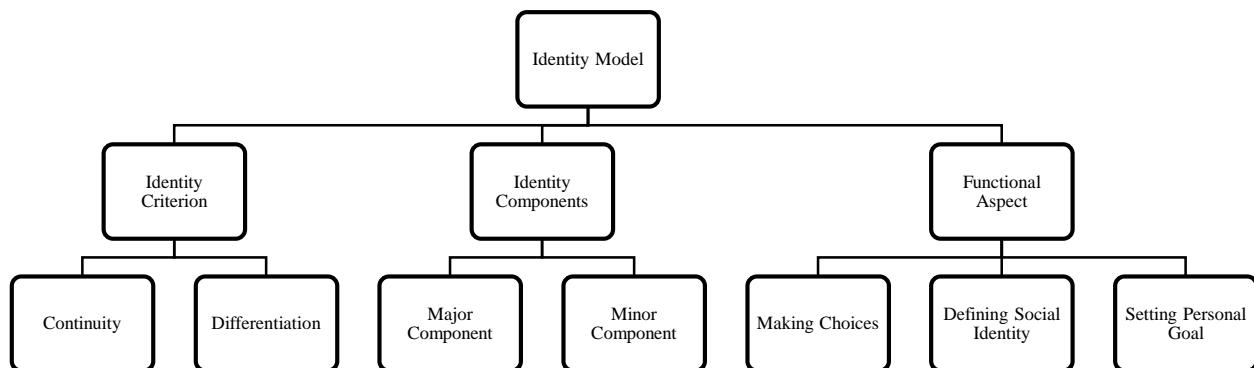
Identity components can be acquired by various self-defining processes: "the components fulfill the defining criteria of identity, and normally each component has all three functional aspects of identity" (1986: 18). The identity model has the following components. First, two defining criterion of identity are continuity and differentiation. A well-defined identity complies with one or both of them. Second, three functional aspects of identity are making choices (to have one's own values and priorities), designing a social identity (to have long-term social

relations) and setting a personal goal (to realize one's potential). Identity crisis makes socialization a problem. It also makes it difficult to follow a life goal.

Third, the two identity components should be aggregated: major (important) identity components and minor (unimportant) identity component. Last, identity is acquired through five self-defining processes: passive assignment of component, single transformation, measured or hierarchal identity, optional choice and required choice (1986: 18).

The fulfillment of the two identity criterion, continuity and differentiated, is essential for a person. Continuity is “unity spread over time”. Values determine behavior, and priorities determine purpose. The choices one make are based on these values and priorities. Identity's functional aspect is social role as well as reputation. Individual potential lies in setting a realistic goal and achieving it. However, if that goal could not be attained due to external forces, the potential should be redirected towards another goal. Inability to realize potential does not mean that the potential is destroyed. Baumeister claims that an identity with “well-defined sense of potential” experiences fulfillment (1986: 20).

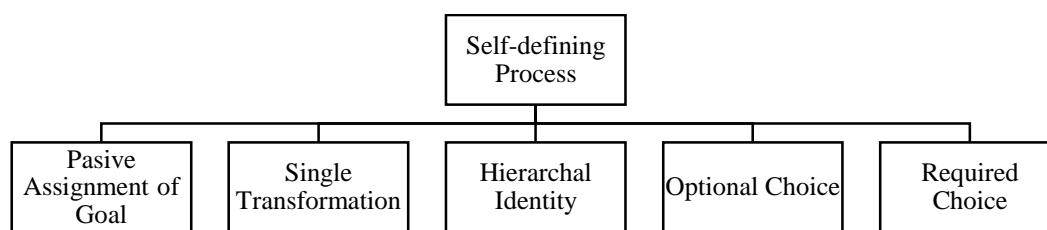
Identity components are infinite. Their unity stands for the unity of meaning. “Any partial definition of self is an identity component” while each component meets the defining criterion (continuity and differentiation) and encompasses all functional aspects (making choices, defining social identity and setting personal goal). An identity component ‘continues’ over time and ‘differentiates’ one person from another. Each person has numerous major and minor identity components. One's major identity component might be minor for another (1986: 20-21).



**Figure 2.** Baumeister's Model of Identity

The self-defining processes help in acquiring identity components. First, passive assignment of component is unproblematic, but social reactions affect one's experience of these roles. Gender becomes a problem for women when the society treats a gender differently. Second, single transformation deals with one well-defined event that meets a social criterion and transforms a person's identity at once. One such transformation is giving birth and becoming a parent. Third, the hierarchical identity is based on those components that are “always subject to redefinition”. One has to constantly struggle for retaining her/his hierarchal identity. Such identity becomes a cause of competition and comparison in a society: class struggle and economic status. The last two processes are based on choices: optional choice and required

choice. Every person has her/his own set of criterion which provide one with many options from which a choice is to be made. In optional choice it depends on a person whether to make a choice or not. When the choice is not made, one has to follow the criterion set by the society. Not complying with the given guideline might subject one to reconsider her/his choice. Choosing a religion is an optional choice which is not made by many; believers are then expected to follow the pre-defined ways in which a religion already prevails in a society. On the other hand, there are subjects in which choice is not optional. An inevitable choice is called required choice. Every society ensures that each person finds or gets a spouse; however, everyone can set her/his own criterion of selecting a spouse. There is no prescribed method for making the selection. One uses meta-criteria (personal values and priorities) to select what suits her/him to make the right choice. (1986: 25-27).



**Figure 3.** Baumeister’s Self-Defining Processes

## Discussion

Identity is an interpretation of self. Its formation lies in basic values, major affiliations and long-term goals. A person exhibits unity and continuity and stays differentiated from others. Identity helps in making choices, defining a social identity and setting a goal that can help in the realization of one’s potential. Choice is a way to rule out undesired possibilities.

## Identity Criterion

Identity is “consistence” and “coherence” over time and keeps people differentiated throughout their lives (Baumeister, 1986: 20). Iris, the narrator thinks that the Chase sisters are trapped on a “thorn-encircled island” (Attwood, 2001: 85). They are waiting for some man who would save them. For Laura Chace the escape from this miserable condition lies in economic freedom. She wants to become financially independent and does not mind doing odd-jobs. Alex can save her. He is a revolutionist who is blamed for burning down the Button Factory; he later joins war where he gets killed. Laura’s only hope is his return from war. Iris is fully aware of her father’s bankruptcy and agrees to marry Richard Griffin. She also develops a sexual relation with Alex and begets his daughter who inherits Richard’s assets.

Mr. Chase goes to the front soon after getting marriage. Even when he returns, depression keeps him distant from his family. Eventually, the girls get more close to their mother. Iris refers to mother as “other-mother” since Laura’s birth, and continues to blame Laura for mother’s emotional detachment. However, the change in mother is an outcome of change in father due to his experiences at the front. Mother becomes more distant when she falls sick amidst pregnancy.



Her condition grows worse with the miscarriage. Laura contends herself by saying that the premature baby, “kitten”, needs mother more than her. Seeing Laura contended disturbs Iris, and she throws her off the ledge (Attwood, 2001: 97). The incident shows Iris’ tendency to hurt Laura.

The two sisters are different because they have different sets of values and priorities. The fear of each other’s disapproval abtains them from sharing their secrets. Ms. Erskine molests Laura, but she does not tell her sisters, knowing Iris would never believe her. In the attic, Iris gets molested by Alex, but she never shares it with Laura. Laura does not tell Iris how Richard is forcing her into a sexual relation, knowing her sister would never believe her. When she gets pregnant, she prefers sharing it with the doctors of the hospital where she is working, instead of informing Iris. Although they remain attached, both physically and emotionally, for more than fifteen years, their differences finally detach them. Before Laura’s suicide, the two have not seen each other for years.

Iris idealizes her grand-mother Adelia and wants to become like her. Laura idealizes mother and tries to help others. The housemaid Reenie and her acquaintances think that Laura’s ideas are “peculiar” and her behavior “eccentric”. Laura continues to eat the crusts of her sandwich in the memory of starving Armenians. Iris tells her that no such children exist, but Laura refuses to believe her. For Laura the life-goal is public service, for Iris it is personal gains. Even she takes care of her young sister to be treated better (Attwood, 2001: 80). Later, Laura even throws herself into the river “so God would let mother live again” (Attwood, 2001: 115). She gets repeatedly disturbed at the “ill-will of the universe”. She also decides to become a nun (Attwood, 2001: 113). The locus of her life keeps shifting, and her inability to adjust accordingly makes people think that she is eccentric.

Iris loves mother but could not reconcile with her mediocre background. It is Adelia who stands for class, taste and strength. Mother has little influence on her as a role model. Later, in the years of puberty, she gets inspired by Callie Fitzsimons, her father’s friend. Since father disapproves any dress that can make her sexuality evident, she is compelled to wear plain and simple clothes (Attwood, 2001: 158-159). It is through marriage that she materializes her wishes. A day before her wedding, Laura congratulates Iris on getting nice clothes as a compensation of marrying a man she does not love (Attwood, 2001: 237). After marriage, Iris’ role gets changed, and her new position demands her to take up the role of an elderly business man’s young wife. Her job is to impress his contacts in public and to “besot” him in private.

In a patriarchal society, the woman does not have many possibilities of defining herself. A woman improves her status by picking a better husband. Her choices and priorities are dictated by the society. Iris idealizes Adelia who got all that a woman deserves through her marriage with the grandfather. Iris’ pretext of marrying Richard is saving save Avilion, Button factory and Laura. For Iris, wealth is the meta-criterion of marriage; for Laura, it is love. Laura is not satisfied with Iris’ choice of husband. Besides, she believes in being helpful and busies herself with charity work and small jobs. Although the two act differently, they cannot escape their assigned role (a passive assignment of identity component) as a woman. Besides, with mother’s



death, ten years old Iris gets another passive role: of raising six years old Laura. Iris' ability to redefine her priorities makes socialization easier while Laura's inability to change her priorities make her socially incompatible.

Laura is truthful, "blunt" and philanthropic. Social encounters make her identity problematic. What others think means nothing to her. She does not feel bad after breaking Iris's cosmetics (Attwood, 2001: 432). Material gains are of great importance to Iris. Even when she leaves Richard's house, she does not forget her jewels, clothes and other important stuff. Contrarily, Laura comes to Richard's house with the notebooks on which the sisters used to do Mr Erskine's work. Her use of words is also very precise and literal. She means what she says. There is no place like home means that no such place exists (Attwood, 2001: 80). The room that has been given to Laura is totally opposite to what she likes. Iris knows her sister's discomfort, but does not interfere with Winifred's aesthetics. The pinks and the frills are abominable for Laura, making the home "unhomely" (Atwood, 2001: 319). At another occasion Laura says, "Future does not exist" (Attwood, 2001: 425). She gives short, direct messages. Her last message to Iris is written in codes. On the other hand, Iris is exceptionally good in the use of words. She even writes Laura's posthumous novel *The Blind Assassin* which becomes a great success. It also shows Iris' command over language. Unlike Laura, she is an expert in creating stories and communicating effectively.

The two idiosyncratic characters remain consistent throughout. They react differently at the same situation. During Button Factory picnic Laura develops a bond with Alex who is an outcast. Iris tries to get close to him during the dinner arranged at Avilion. It was attended by Mr. Chase, Richard, Iris, Laura and Alex. She calls it an "insidious" beginning (Attwood, 2001: 190). Here Iris carefully makes arrangements for Alex's sitting right next to her, instead of sitting with Laura who has invited him. When the factory is set at fire, Laura gives Alex sanctuary. She does all that is in her power to save the poor soul from Richard's wrath. Iris' role is that of a facilitator (Attwood, 2001: 210). Both sisters make a choice: Laura gives him shelter; Iris pleasure. Alex calls Iris the "practical sister" of the "angel". With Alex's departure, the sisters grow emotionally distant. Laura knows that Iris does not want to see her in the Button Factory picnic picture. She cuts herself off from the print she gives to Iris. From her won copy, Iris is cut off (Attwood, 2001: 220). Laura makes it her mission (long-term goal) to protect Alex. First, she tries to bring him back to God through counseling. Later, she agrees to sleep with Richard to protect Alex from getting caught as Richard claims that he knows Alex's whereabouts.

### **Functional Role**

Identity crisis initiates when one gets social disapproval or faces problems in fulfilling life goal. The sisters, with their distinct outlook of life, react differently to social pressure and social disapproval. Iris changes herself during mother's sickness to get her approval (Attwood, 2001: 93). Later, she molds herself to get father's approval. She takes up the responsibility of Laura because it pleases her parents. She also transforms herself as per Richard's expectations. She

diligently follows Winifred's commands because Richard desires so. Her ability to change her priorities and values helps her in sustaining. On the other, Laura becomes rebellious when Richard, after the death of Mr. Chase, decides to take her to Toronto. She also refuses to change her opinion on religious issues when she gets expelled from school. Even Laura's act of committing suicide is a way of exerting her will in an incompatible society.

The sisters lose their major affiliation with mother's death. When the father who is suffering from post-war depression comes into their lives, they start having problem. The first problem is their gender. Iris transforms herself according to father's wishes, and vents out her pent-up emotions either by hurting Laura or by teasing Reenie. Laura does not know how to change with the changing world, and completely relies on her sister who becomes her major affiliation. A silver-framed picture of their childhood shows Iris ferociously gripping Laura's blanket while Laura's fingers are "circled around" Iris' thumb (Attwood, 2001: 85). Laura's greatest fear is losing Iris (Attwood, 2001: 65). Iris' greatest fear is disapproval. Iris defines their smiles in the old frame "imposed by the threat of disapproval" (Attwood, 2001: 80). Laura hates surprises and finds the will of God surprising and disturbing. Laura commits suicide when she receives the greatest surprise of her life: Iris' affair with Alex.

The signs of a developing a social identity are evident in Iris since she has the ability to learn something from everyone. She learns the art of dressing up from Callie, and of taking revenge from Mr. Erskine, the tutor. Laura, after getting physically and sexually abused by the tutor, develops the skill of subtracting herself. She becomes indifferent and absent-minded when she does not like a person (Attwood, 2001: 166-167). Laura's exposure to undesired experience from an early age aggregates her personal problems.

The incident of Laura getting mad takes place in the hospital where she works as an Abigail. There she also says that Richard has tried to kill Iris (Attwood, 2001: 429). After that she is sent to Bella Vista where she goes through abortion and treated as a psycho. Iris does not have the courage to face the truth. She remains indecisive on the subject of Laura: whether she is sane or insane. Being sick after giving birth, she does not try to find Laura. It is Reenie who gets Laura out of the lunatic asylum. On Reenie's call when Iris goes to Port Ticonderoga, she is being blamed for Laura's misfortunes.

After father's demise, Laura cannot live alone. She is a minor. However, Richard also wants to take everything under his control everything that belongs to Mr. Chase: his daughters, his factory and his mansion. The money left in her name would not be hers till she comes of age. She is willing to do jobs but is not permitted (Attwood, 2001: 327). When Mr. and Mrs. Griffen come to take Laura to Toronto, she insists that she can look after herself (Attwood, 2001: 316). However, she is forced to leave Avilion. She tries to make a choice by getting off the train in midway. She starts working in a waffle booth. There she lives happily within the proximity of smelling armpits and sleeps in a charity bed (Attwood, 2001: 324). However, she gets "rescued" by Richard, Iris and Winifred who disapproves of her way of life. When Iris questions her, she clarifies that her elopement was an effort to prove that she could ("that we do

not have to”) live on her own. This is the point, where she parts ways with Iris, knowing her elder sister does not support her.

Laura faces problems in developing social ties. Like many other places of social interaction, an educational institution shapes students into the same, but Laura refuses to conform. She gets expelled from school because she brought God into question (Attwood, 2001: 374). Her class fellows did not take her seriously as she was too blunt and literal. She gets enrolled in another school where she faces the same problems till she finally decides not to go to school at all (Attwood, 2001: 421). Laura complains of not having a life and wants to leave Richard’s house, but Iris is not interested in her melodrama. Her dissatisfaction grows, and the signs of unhappiness becomes more evident. Even her music starts sounding gloomy (Attwood, 2001: 368). When Iris prompts Laura to give up the idea of Alex which makes her unhappy, she bursts: “Unhappy! What do you know about unhappy?” (Attwood, 2001: 336). During the voyage on Queen Mary, Laura informs Iris how she intends to walk dogs for a living. She accuses Iris of making the stupid promise of looking after her. She is sixteen and old enough to know if she is ill. She admits that “father fobbed (her) off” on Iris and absolves Iris of the promise she has made (Attwood, 2001: 378). Every effort on her part for defining self gets rejected by her guardians. Laura gets raped by Richard but never tells Iris because she knows her sister would not believe her. After Laura’s death when Iris comes to know of her sexual assault, she changes her life goals. She takes revenge from Richard and preserves the memory of Laura.

### **Self-Defining Process**

By becoming a mother, Iris goes through single-transformation. There is no confusion regarding her new identity. The identity emerging from motherhood is stable, permanent and unproblematic. It is also the way society categorizes people. Iris is a mother. Contrarily, Laura conceives an illegitimate child who is forcefully aborted. Abortion leaves Laura halfway in the process of single-transformation. The very act of driving off the bridge is a way of relieving her post-trauma anxiety. Freud equates this way of suicide to “be delivered of a child” (2010: 3851). Iris shares Richard’s class and influence. She has found a place in social hierarchy. Laura has found no such identity. The optional choice of belief system does not benefit Laura. Laura has always believed in making choices and living in a way that suits her. However, she is not given the right to choose because it is not other’s interest. Iris finds no fault with her belief-system and never makes the optional choice. On the contrary, Laura speculates on the ways of God (Attwood, 2001: 137-138). She makes the optional choice and interprets religion with her own experience of it. However, she does not make the required choice of marriage. Once during breakfast with their mother, Laura makes it clear that she would not have a husband and would rather spend her life in the garage and sleep in the car. Though Iris makes the same claim, but she does it only to compete with Laura (Attwood, 2001: 87).

Social disapproval affects personal growth. By deadening creativity of a person, by challenging her life-goals, by rejecting her choices, the society intervenes in the process of self-definition. When a person is forced to behave in a certain way, her stability gets affected.

Though Reenie believes that Laura is sane, the possibility of losing mental stability exists. She is forced to act in the ways dictated by elders while she is given no opportunity to realize her potential. A dissatisfactory childhood and an unhappy youth are experiences that push her to a point where she becomes a victim of self-aggression. Her only hope is death.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident from the above discussion that self-definition is the most natural process that is not only essential for a person's growth but also for her/his happiness. Identity is stable, constant and different. It is identity that develops the characteristic behavior of a person and differentiates her/him from others for life goals help a person in realizing her/his potential. Every person uses the material provided by the society in her/his own way. Siblings evolve into different personalities by their ability to use the given material as per their individual capacity. Laura and Iris, being the members of the same family, behave differently and live in two entirely different ways. Their outlooks have nothing in common.

Iris' readiness in adopting to continuously changing circumstances makes her a healthy social constituent who is capable of reciprocating social influences. Laura, however, turns out to be an eccentric as her basic values and priorities set her in complete contrast to the society. She is an introvert and a misfit. The right to make choice is taken away from her on the pretext of her being a minor. Her efforts of self-defining get rejected by her guardians who have different basic values and priorities. She fails in four self-defining processes. Passive assignment of goal as a woman becomes controversial as she is born to a father who desires a baby boy. Her gender becomes a curse when she gets molested. Single transformation as a mother remains incomplete as her baby gets aborted. She does not believe in material gains so there is no hierarchical identity. She does not inherit anything either. The required choice is never made. The only self-defining process that she ever fulfils is of optional choice. Since her views about God and His ways are highly controversial, this process of defining self only creates problems for her. Unlike Iris who remains successful in satisfying her biological and social needs, Laura only suffers emotional, sexual and social dissatisfaction. Her basic values and priorities happen to be the only constant functional aspect while her major affiliations and long-term goals keep changing, posing great difficulty in her interpretation of self. She remains failed in giving her life a direction. Her attachment with Alex with whom she has no contact for years shows her social alienation. The idea of Alex's return makes Laura's life meaningful.

Identity crisis is the inability of self in defining itself as well as in its inability to realize its potential. From time to time, Iris has defined herself in terms of different social roles that gave her social acceptance and approval. She identifies her creative potential and realizes it. It is also therapeutic since she confesses the role she has played in Laura's plight. Laura, who could have served God as a nun or humanity as a social worker, is neither given the right to choose for herself nor a social role to live a constructive life. Her efforts of defining self repeatedly get affected by the demise of her major affiliations: her mother, then father and later her love (in case of mother and lover, she attempts suicide). Iris has also been her major affiliation for a long

time, but Iris' indifference and disinterest gradually increased the distance between the two. The only time when Laura succeeds in exercising her will is when she drives off the bridge. In death she finds both: functional aspect of identity (making choice) and self-defining process (single transformation).

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